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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000722

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2018  
TAGS: PHUM KIRF PGOV PINR PREL TI UZ  
SUBJECT: SURKHANDARYA PROVINCE ACTIVIST REPORTS  
CROSS-BORDER ARREST OF HIZB UT-TAHRIR MEMBERS

REF: A. TASHKENT 660  
    1B. 07 TASHKENT 1888  
    1C. 07 TASHKENT 1889

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary: On June 20, human rights activist Fakhriddin Tilloev reported to poloffs the torture and imprisonment of four alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members in Surkhandarya province. According to Tilloev, all four were allegedly linked to a Tajik HT leader named "Norillov," who invited the men to an HT conference in Tajikistan and tasked them with recruiting new HT members and distributing HT literature. All four allegedly were arrested in Tajikistan by the Tajik National Security Service (NSS) and then turned over to Uzbek authorities. On May 26, they were sentenced to six years' imprisonment for membership in a religious extremist organization after reportedly being tortured in pre-trial detention. In addition, Tilloev reported that a member of the Erk political party in Surkhandarya remains under house arrest after being fined for hooliganism in November 2007. Tilloev raised serious allegations of human rights abuses in Surkhandarya province which we are so far unable to verify. If Tilloev's information is correct, it also seems to indicate that religious extremists are using Tajikistan as a base to spread their ideology in Uzbekistan, and that the National Security Services of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are cooperating together in combating such groups. End summary.

Report of Torture Cases Involving Alleged HT Members

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12. (C) On June 20, Surkhundarya-based activist Fakhriddin Tilloev, chief of the unregistered "Ozod Fukaro" ("Free Citizen") human rights group and a member of the opposition Erk political party, informed poloffs of the torture and imprisonment of four alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members: Abdurakhman Boltayev, Temir Mamasolaev, Hamid Togaev and Abdusobut Akhmedov, all members of the Koralang Mahalla in the Denau District of Surkhandarya province. Tilloev said

that all four were allegedly linked to a Tajik HT leader named "Norillov," who Tilloev said was known to have a house in Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya Province and financial contacts that stretched to Saudi Arabia and Dubai. According to Tilloev, Norillov invited all four to an HT conference in Tajikistan and tasked them with recruiting new HT members and distributing HT literature. All four allegedly were arrested in Tajikistan by the Tajik National Security Service (NSS) and then turned over to Uzbek authorities and charged under Articles 159 and 244 (anti-constitutional activities and participation in an extremist religious organization respectively, common charges against suspected HT members) of the Uzbek Criminal Code. Tilloev believed that all four individuals arrested were genuine HT members. A fifth individual, Holmahmad Saidov, reportedly the leader of the HT branch in Surkhandarya province, escaped arrest in Tajikistan. Government law enforcement officials reportedly searched the houses of all four individuals and found HT leaflets on the premises.

¶13. (C) Tilloev informed Poloff that, according to Akhmedov's wife, Akhmedov had been tortured for over a month by the Uzbek NSS during the investigation. According to Tilloev, Akhmedov was severely beaten, causing serious visible damage to the right side of his face. Tilloev noted that the NSS had threatened Akhmedov's lawyer to prevent him from raising the issue of torture, and NSS officials reportedly told Akhmedov that they would rape his wife if he refused to confess.

¶14. (C) Tilloev also reported that Boltaev, Mamasolaev, and

Togaev were also mistreated during their detentions, claiming that all three individuals' wives were brought before them in jail and threatened with rape before their eyes and imprisonment if they refused to confess. Tilloev said he received this information from family members of these three individuals.

¶15. (C) Tilloev noted that all four had been sentenced to six years imprisonment under Article 244 of the Criminal Code. He noted that no relatives were allowed to attend the court proceedings and that the trial took place behind closed doors. According to Tilloev, only one lawyer was provided by the government to all four defendants. The trial reportedly took place on May 25-26 and the court proceedings allegedly lasted eight hours. Mamasolaev and Togaev reportedly did not confess during the proceedings. Tolleev said that he had requested a copy of the verdict but that the government lawyer had told him that it was "not ready."

¶16. (C) Tilloev told Poloff that he had located a lawyer named Bashanov who was formerly a judge and also an official in a local Procurator's Office with some previous success in defending individuals charged under Articles 159 and 244 of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code. He said that for 500 dollars, Bashanov would file an appeal on behalf of all four individuals and "fight their cases until the end."

#### ERK ACTIVIST REPORTEDLY UNDER HOUSE ARREST

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¶17. (C) Tilloev also informed poloffs of the case of Hurram Berdiev, a member of the Erk opposition party, whom an administrative court reportedly levied a 65,000 soum (50 dollars) fine against for "hooliganism" in a closed hearing in November 2007. Tilloev said that the court gave Berdiev one month to pay the fine and reported that Berdiev was unable to meet that burden, in part because he had since lost his job and his family members were also unemployed. Tilloev believes that Berdiev was targeted by authorities because he was openly critical of the Karimov regime and supported demands for an international investigation into the 2005 Andijon events. According to Tilloev, Berdiev was also detained three times in 2006 by local police for storing and distributing Erk's underground newsletter (Note: In October 2007, the France-based Association for Human Rights in Central Asia claimed in a press release that Berdiev had

"disappeared without a trace," which is clearly not the case.  
End note.)

¶18. (C) According to Tilloev, government officials came to Berdiev's house on June 10 and demanded that he pay the fine immediately. Berdiev reportedly told the officials he was unable to pay, upon which they allegedly sought to confiscate livestock that were in the vicinity of Berdiev's home. When Berdiev protested that the livestock did not belong to him, MVD officials reportedly handcuffed him and detained him overnight. Although he was released the next day, the local Procurator's Office sent notice to Berdiev a couple of days later to show up to their office. According to Tilloev, Berdiev's pregnant wife showed up instead, hoping to prevent his arrest. An altercation with the authorities reportedly ensued, including shouting and some pushing and shoving, Berdiev's wife was taken to the hospital from the Procurator's Office and soon after gave birth. The baby, a boy, and Berdiev's wife are both reportedly in good health. According to Tilloev, Berdiev remains under house arrest.

COMMENT

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¶19. (C) Tilloev, a human rights activist and member of the Erk opposition party, raises serious allegations of human rights abuses in Surkhandarya province which we are so far unable to verify. Tilloev remains our only source on the case of the four HT members, and he has not yet provided us with a copy of the verdict against them. Our main concern in such religious extremism cases has long been that defendants are not provided due process of law, and we will continue to follow this case closely. What is unusual here is that, unlike in the majority of HT cases covered by human rights activists, Tilloev does not deny that the four individuals in Surkhandarya province were members of HT. If Tilloev's information is correct, it raises the possibility that religious extremists are using Tajikistan as a platform to spread their ideology to Uzbekistan, and that the National Security Services of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are cooperating together in combating religious extremism. Both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have been previously known to extradite alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members to Uzbekistan, including most recently Erkin Halikov (ref A). Nevertheless, other members of Erk, including Erk Secretary General Atanazar Arif, have earlier provided us with information on Hizb ut-Tahrir's activities which appeared to us to be of questionable reliability (refs B and C), and we cannot rule out the possibility that Tilloev's information is also government-fed.

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